



Middle East Studies

at Marine Corps University

23 November 2009

INFORMATION PAPER

Subject: Iranian military launches large-scale air defense war games to protect nuclear facilities.

1. **Purpose:** To inform leadership of the significance and possible implications of the Iranian militaries large-scale air defense war games to protect nuclear facilities.
2. **Key Points:**
 - On 22 November 2009, the Iranian military and the Islamic Republic Guard Corps (IRGC) began large-scale joint air defense war games scheduled to last for 5 days.
 - The aim of these exercises, according to state run media sources is to display Iran's deterrence capabilities, combat readiness, military potentials, and defensive capabilities in dealing with any possible military strikes against Iran's nuclear facilities.
 - According to Iranian military officials and state run media sources the drill is the largest air defense drill ever with maneuvers taking place over 600,000 sq km in various parts of Iran.
 - These war games come on the heels of a number of recent developments in regards to Iran's nuclear program; which are laid out below.

Background

- Iran often holds defense exercises and announces advances in military equipment in order to show its readiness to counter any threats over its disputed nuclear program.
 - The scale of military exercises are often exaggerated and highly publicized by Iranian military and government officials as part of Iran's psychological and overall asymmetric warfare strategy, that being said the timing and focus of the war games in this case are important.
- Iran has continually threatened to hit back at Israel and U.S. bases and interests in the region if it is attacked, the statements made during these war games are no exception.
 - On 21 November, cleric Mojtaba Zolnour (a deputy of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's representative in the IRGC) said, "If the enemy should want to test its bad luck in Iran, before the dust from its missiles settles in this country, Iran's ballistic missiles would land in the heart of Tel Aviv," IRNA news agency reported.
 - The commander of IRGC air force wing, Amir Ali Hajizadeh told Iran's Fars news agency, "Their [Israeli] F-15 and F-16 fighters will be trapped by our air defense forces and will be annihilated. Even if their planes escape and land at the bases from which they took off, their bases will be struck by our destructive surface-to-surface missiles."

Recent developments taken into account in bottom line assessment

- The announcement of the war games came a day after senior officials from the UN P5+1 met to discuss Tehran's apparent refusal of a UN proposal intended to delay its potential to make nuclear weapons, urging Tehran to reconsider the proposal.
 - High ranking Iranian official's statements regarding the UN nuclear proposal continue to contradict one another, apparently as part of Tehran's strategy to further stall nuclear negotiations.



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- The UN P5+1 meeting came on the heels of President Barack Obama warning to Tehran that there could be a package of sanctions against Iran within weeks.
- Iranian officials have recently become more vocal in their dissatisfaction with Russia's failure to deliver on agreements to ship the S-300 air defense systems to Iran.
 - The truck-mounted S-300PMU1 (known in the West as the SA-20) can shoot down cruise missiles and aircraft, and can fire at targets up to 150 km away.
 - Many Iranian officials believe Russia's delay in supplying high-grade S-300 missiles is political, and due to pressure by Israel and the US, not technical problems as cited by Moscow.
 - "They [Russia] have declared technical problems as the underlying reason for this delay, but we think it has been due to the Zionists' pressure," Brigadier General Ahmad Mighani (head of the armed forces' air defense headquarters) said, Fars reported. "We are hopeful the Russians will ignore the pressure of the Zionist lobby."
 - A senior Iranian MP last week said Russia was using the Islamic Republic as a "pawn" in Moscow's dealings with other powers such as the United States.
- On 3 November, U.S. and Israel completed joint ballistic missile defense exercised dubbed "Operation Juniper Cobra".

3. Bottom Line:

- These war games further indicate that Tehran has made the decision that it will continue along its current path in regards to its nuclear programs, while it continues to use stalling tactics with the P5+1 as it advances its nuclear progress and prepares for the possibility of a strike against its facilities.
- Although statements from high ranking Iranian officials have been contradictory in regards to the P5+1 nuclear proposal to Iran, these war games may be viewed as a clear answer to the international community that Tehran has no intention of straying from its current path as the P5+1 sits down to discuss what steps should be taken against Iran's apparent refusal of the nuclear proposal on the table.
- The war games can also be viewed as a sign from Tehran to the West that even without the Russian S-300; the military is ready and capable of defending its nuclear facilities against an attack.
- These war games can be viewed largely as part of Iran's psychological and overall asymmetric warfare strategy to deter the West, and especially Israel, and show that it has the capability of defending its nuclear facilities (even if this capability is exaggerated) and also has the capability to strike back.
- Leading up to and as the war games are taking place, Iranian officials continue to pressure Moscow to fulfill its agreements to deliver the S-300 air defense system; which begs the question of how secure does Iran really feel in regards to its current air defense capabilities?

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